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## Spatial Realignment of German Voters and Germany's Regional Cleavage: The Case of the Green Party in the 2019 European Elections

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### Abstract

*This article seeks to explain the increase in the German Green party votes in 2019 European elections through the East-West cleavage. Using the 2018 German General Social Survey data, it identifies and compares the Green Party electorate in both regions in terms of conventional and supposed determinants of Green voting. Results of the multivariate analysis equally support both models, indicating left-wing voters as the main source of the Greens' electoral gains across Germany. However, while in the East the Greens were supported primarily by the electorate of the Social Democratic party dissatisfied with the activity of this party, Western Germans exhibited a trend of left-leaning voters' backlash against the rise of the radical right party Alternative for Germany through Green voting. This realignment is explicated by the persistent specifics of German regional party politics combined with intrinsic value distinctions of their dwellers, and recent shifts in party-voters ties.*

### Keywords

European Parliament Elections; German Party System; Green Party; Regional Cleavage; Voters' Realignment

## Introduction

One of the chief intrigues of the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections, particularly in Germany, was the populist radical right forces' degree of success (Koerner 2018). However, contrary to the alarming forecasts, German electorate generated another, perhaps far more surprising output. It elevated the *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (Alliance 90/The Greens) to the position of the second most popular party with around one-fifth of the total votes, which is almost twice the party's result at the previous European elections – 20.5 vs 10.7 per cent of votes (Federal Returning Officer's Federal Statistical Office 2019).

The performance of the “tree-huggers” and “eco-nerds” (Lehmann 2019) who had been consistently perceived as a mere one-issue party throughout their not so long intra-parliamentary history (Blühdorn 2009, 36-40) nudged the expert community to develop new *ex post* explanatory models to fit the renewed, green reality. Many analysts came up with a structural explanation of the Green electoral phenomenon that could be defined in terms of the crisis and decline of Angela Merkel's mode of consensual and grand coalition politics targeting the alleged “median voter” (Brattberg 2019; Holtz-Bacha 2019; Poguntke 2019). Theoretically, such an approach, which primarily considers political opportunity structure – characteristics of parties and party competition – is defined as a *supply-side* explanation (for more see: Brunsbach, Stefanie, and Werner 2012; Kitschelt 1986). The impact of the citizens' frustration and the overall loss of agency and authenticity by the German left-wing parties, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in the first place, has been specifically accentuated (see Pfister 2019).

An evident shortcoming of such an approach is its inability to distinguish the set of individual traits that could prompt support for the Green party. In turn, the available scope of scholarly literature devoted to the *demand-side* explanation (concerned with sociocultural factors of voting, i.e. aspirations and grievances of citizens) comprises profound quantitative explanations of the Green parties' electoral results either within the context of cross-national comparisons or the German case exclusively (see: Schumacher 2014; Rüdiger 2012; Dolezal 2010). Nevertheless, studies of the German Green party have systematically paid negligible attention to the established decades-long contrast in the Green party electoral performance in old and new (i.e. Western and Eastern) federal states of Germany.<sup>1</sup> This contrast has once

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the work, the notion of Western Germany (Western German states) refers to the 10 federal states (*Länder*), which have constituted the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) since its very foundation in 1949. In turn, Eastern Germany (Eastern German states) designates five states of the former socialist German

again manifested itself in the last European election but has so far attracted only marginal academic coverage (see: Franz, Fratzscher, and Kritikos 2019).<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the unprecedented allocation of votes for the Green party in the May 2019 European elections, reflecting the presence of the metamorphic shifts in the German political parties' support, remains insufficiently and inadequately elucidated. Therefore, it serves as a research puzzle, which this article seeks to unravel, especially given the voters' realignment trends having been unfolding since the 2017 Bundestag elections and reflected in the opinion polls and regional elections' results.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the absence of multi-faceted research explaining electoral performance of the German Greens in the 2019 EP elections in a cross-regional perspective, i.e. focusing on the patterns of the party votes' distribution along the East-West fault line, contributes to the academic relevance of the present article. With respect to this, the research question of this article is: *What demand-side factors did influence the regional distribution of the Green party votes in the 2019 European election?*

In turn, to accomplish this goal, we need to address the widely accepted treatment of the European elections as second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). In practical terms, second-order elections literature contends and empirically demonstrates that since those elections (local or European ones) do not determine the composition of the national government, citizens are less concerned and conscious about them, which entails a lower turnout, protest vote and a higher percentage of votes for minor parties (Carrubba and Timpono 2008). Nonetheless, we argue that the research object of this article – *preferences of German voters before the 2019 European election*, which are the closest proxy to illuminate the voting results and their distribution across Germany – possesses several attributes of relevance representing a valid piece of empirical data. Furthermore, the outcome of that European election serves as a suitable departure point for the research inquiry in the given framework, since results of our study account not solely for the particular election's outcome but point out more fundamental shifts in the German voters' realignment in terms of the party-voters ties.

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Democratic Republic (GDR), which existed from 1949 until 1990 and which became a part of the FRG in 1990. The full list of Eastern and Western states' names can be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> In Western Germany, the Greens improved their results by an average of 10%, whereas in Eastern Germany corresponding figures account for nearly 5% (See Appendix 1).

<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, it refers to the fall of popularity of the German catch-all *Volkspartei* (people's parties) – Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) – whose voters have been leaking primarily to the Greens and populist radical right "Alternative for Germany" (AfD).

The following arguments could be cited in support of this claim. The turnout in the 2019 European elections in Germany rose substantially in comparison to the elections of 2014 – 61% versus 48%. That contrast stands out, as the turnout figures for Germany have been fluctuating around 45% since the 1999 European election. If one adds a structural factor of the previously mentioned ongoing reconfiguration of a balance of power between national political parties, it serves together as a strong evidence supporting a suggested thesis. It could be aggravated by the aforementioned emergence of the populist radical right AfD on the German political stage after the 2017 legislative election that may have pushed many moderate voters to the electoral mobilization against this party perceived as a threat to the political mainstream. Finally, minor challenger parties, such as the German Greens, have been considered the ones most capable of earning political capital on European elections and of subsequently transmitting it to the national level (Rüdig 2019; Schulte-Cloos 2018).<sup>4</sup>

What is more, party votes' geographical distribution in the 2019 European elections relative to the several federal states coincides largely with the respective results of October 2018 state (*Landtag*) elections in Hesse, Bavaria, as well as those in Bremen (Western Germany) in May 2019 and autumn 2019 elections in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia (Eastern Germany). Above all, it applies to the high results of the Greens in the former three elections and their moderate performance in the latter three cases.<sup>5</sup> Two propositions may be brought out from the described peculiarity – that the 2019 European election results reflect not a spontaneous but a fundamental shift in the German voters' preferences and that the East-West regional difference in Green voting is a persistent phenomenon.

Insofar as the given spatial distribution of the Green party votes relative to the East-West divide represents a worthy research puzzle, the goal of this article is to explain region-specific drivers of the Greens' electoral support augmentation in the 2019 European election using the *demand-side* explanation. In this, we rely on the assumption that the regional cleavage between Eastern and Western Germany has affected patterns of party-voters alignment (Abedi 2017), which in turn influenced the research focus of our work – factors determining Green voting in both regions. For the sake of achieving the stated goal, demand-side determinants of Green voting in Germany, divided into conventional and newly derived

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the mixed-member proportional representation electoral system used for Bundestag and regional elections, the European elections in Germany operate within the framework of the variation of the open lists proportional system known as *panachage*.

<sup>5</sup> The Greens' results in the 2019 European election in the given states (state elections' results given in parentheses): Hesse – 23.4% (19.8%), Bavaria – 19.1% (17.6%), Bremen – 22.7% (17.4%), Brandenburg – 12.3% (10.8%), Saxony – 10.3% (8.6%), Thuringia – 8.6% (5.2%) (Federal Returning Officer's Federal Statistical Office 2019).

ones, will be examined using a multivariate OLS regression analysis of two separate regional samples and region-specific interaction effects within models of the general population. Based on the obtained results, inferences regarding the East-West divergence in terms of the factors fueling the Green's support will be drawn.

The overall structure of the article takes the form of four sections along with a conclusion. The first two sections are concerned with a literature review on the description of the Green party voting clientele, articulating conventional determinants of the Greens' support and those drawn from the new theoretical propositions. The third section proceeds with an empirical analysis of formulated assumptions on the selected database, followed by the interpretation of discovered patterns. In the last section we link our empirical results with the theoretical strands of the article. Finally, the conclusion gives a brief summary of the findings and discusses their value for further research in the area of regional party-voters realignment in the FRG.

## **Conventional predictors of the Green voting in Germany**

### ***East-West divide: "Separated in spirit, united in heart"***

As regards Germany, the term 'regional cleavage' is used to point out the cultural differences that arose in a country after the 1989 reunification of the capitalist FRG and a socialist block member GDR. It is claimed that although the wall in Berlin – serving as a symbol of the separation of not only the German people but also the whole world – fell down, a 'Wall in mind' of Germans stayed in place (Hepburn and Hough 2012, 74). This metaphor denotes the situation, in which no material barriers between two artificially separated parts of the one nation were left, but the impact of 40 years of living under different political and economic systems started to manifest itself. In general, it has pertained to cultural differentiation embodied in a formation of the idiosyncratic Eastern identity rooted in the rejection of the outcomes of unification (*Trotzidentität*), nostalgic feeling about certain aspects of living in the GDR (*Ostalgie*) as well as the unacceptance of western liberal values (Staab 1998).

Obviously, such divergence had long-term implications for the patterns of electoral behavior (see: Rohrschneider 2015). Concerning the Greens, the greater portion of votes obtained by the party in Western states is not *ipso facto* something out of the ordinary. Electoral history of the Greens has been accompanied with a disproportionally stronger performance in the Western states of the Federal Republic (Rüdig 2012, 110-12). Multiple studies agree that this feature is related to the political essence of the Greens as a niche party for a particular audience, most of whom reside in West Germany (Poguntke 1998; Markovits

and Silvia 1997, 115-18). Collectively, they outline a critical role of a dissonance between the dominant Western and Eastern German values, due to the separate history of the two states and the prolonged implications of that divide (ibid; Milder and Jarausch 2015, 4-5, 20). In particular, the origin of the Green party from the Western German mass movements of the 1960s and 1970s has provided a sense of continuity of the existence of Greens, as well as the perception of a party as a natural part of the national political stage (Poguntke 1992, 348-50). Likewise, an entire generation of Germans was introduced to the Greens' image, values and personalities (Rüdig 2012, 114-17). Those factors have been completely absent in the Eastern states.

In turn, many dwellers of the former GDR possess a specific nostalgic memory and amiable attitudes towards the ideals of the "Old" Left (privileged position of the proletariat, big state, etc.), affected by life under socialist rule or having been brought up by the people who lived under socialism (Markovits and Silvia 1997, 120-23). This historically contingent feature contributes to the understanding of the Easterners' propensity to favor the socialist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, an heir of the GDR ruling party – SED) and its successor – The Left (*Die Linke*). Moreover, it is argued that value orientations of people living in post-socialist states are hardly compatible with the ideas of the New Left, rooted in the post-material values transmitted by the Greens (ibid). Built on this argument, it is possible to articulate the first – baseline - hypothesis of our research:

- H1: *If an individual lives in Western Germany, the probability of voting for the Greens is higher.*

### ***Sociodemographic profile***

From the outset, the bundle of nearly inalienable sociodemographic features of the German Green Party adherents' profile could be trailed through the whole volume of studies on the topic. The paradigmatic constituents of the Green electorate are females, highly educated people and urban dwellers with above average incomes and secular views, being represented by new middle-class members, students and public sector employees as well as those engaged in socio-cultural professions (Frankland 2019; Schumacher 2014, 313-15; Dolezal 2010, 542-48). With regard to age categories, the largest portions of Green supporters tend to be found among members of the so-called 'new social movements' (NSM) generation<sup>6</sup> (aged 60-74), people of upper-middle age (45-60), and the youngest (aged 18-24)

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of the 'new social movements' generation embraces the most active participants of the New Left movements in the 1970s and 1980s, accordingly (Fogt 1982 and Mohr 1992 as cited in Rüdig 2012, 115). If sticking to the common generational classification, those people partially fall into the cohort of the 'baby-boomers' generation, but since the notion of the NSM generation bears a specific sociopolitical imprint relevant to the European Green movements it will be utilized in our analysis instead.

cohort of an enfranchised population (Dolezal 2007, 3-11; Bürklin and Dalton 1994; Rüdig 2012, 115-17).

Theoretical groundings behind such a composition maintain that the location of an individual at the intersection of the listed groups makes a person much more susceptible to the post-material challenges of the postindustrial society (Dalton 2013; Inglehart 2008), which involve, apart from an appealing and urgent issue of ecology, tendencies of personal empowerment and emancipative equality (Poguntke 1992, 348-50). Albeit, some groups, especially women, could vote Green because of their left economic stances as well (Rüdig 2012, 115). The above description of a median Green voter is also backed by the overrepresentation of the foregoing categories among the virtual voters of the party in a number of the preceding elections (ibid, 113-22). The totality of the aforementioned characteristics, for the sake of parsimony, is reduced to four hypotheses about the sociodemographic profile of the Green party supporters:

- H2.1: *If an individual belongs to the female gender, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*
- H2.2: *The higher personal educational level, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*
- H2.3: *If an individual is a middle-class member or student, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*
- H2.4: *If an individual belongs to the youngest cohort of population or the ones aged between 45 and 60 or the NSM generation (only for Western Germany), the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*

### **Values and political attitudes**

The core trait that stretches the profile of the average Green voter beyond the boundaries of classic class and secular-religious cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) culminates in the party's early motto: "we are neither left nor right but green" (Milder and Jarausch 2015, 6). The paramount premise that has made such political positioning possible is the "silent revolution" of the 1960s-1970s and its effects described by Ronald Inglehart, which entailed a cardinal shift of values from the material (survival) to the post-material (self-empowerment and emancipation) ones in the minds of Western Europeans (Inglehart 2015). Today, the Green party has shifted towards the ideological center, notwithstanding retaining its authentic "left-libertarian 'rainbow catch-all' position" (Grant and Tilley 2019, 508-9) that implies demands for the rights of various minorities and multiculturalism (Kitschelt 1988; Blühdorn 2009, 45-49). Similarly, strong pro-European orientations of the Greens and advocacy of pro-immigration policies could be ascribed to the cosmopolitanism of the



Greens' sympathizers (Dolezal 2010, 542-48; Bomberg 2002, 33-36; Patton 2018, 64). Hence, the next two hypothesis of the present article could be formulated as follows:

- H3.1: *The higher the level of post-material values absorbance by individual, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*
- H3.2: *If an individual internalized left-libertarian issue attitudes towards issues of migration and the European Union, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*

### ***Controls: Economic voting***

The Greens have been recognized to constitute a genuine part of the left side of the German parties' political spectrum with respect to the economic dimension (Markovits and Silvia 1997, 123-28). What is more, the ideological justification of the party's egalitarian policies goes beyond mere socialist redistributive justice, advocated by The Left and its moderate social democratic counterparts (ibid). The Greens have contested the paternalistic nature of a classic welfare state, natural to its classical social-democratic comprehension. Instead, party ideology puts forward an idea of an emancipative social state based on the principle of participatory justice (*Teilhabegerechtigkeit*) (Blühdorn 2009, 44-45), substituting direct financial transfers to the worse-off with investments in the provision of equal opportunities for the disadvantaged (ibid).

Nevertheless, practically, egalitarian economic considerations are considered to have no influence on the Greens electoral results (Williams, Stegmaier, and Debus 2017). There are several justifications for that. One puts an emphasis on the underclass' proclivity to vote for more tangible welfare promises of the populist left, exacerbated with the Greens' cultural progressiveness depicted above and not shared, as a rule, by the lower stratum (Dolezal 2007, 23), as reflected in Lipset's notion of "working-class authoritarianism" (Lipset 1959). Besides, many Germans simply do not treat social justice as a single-issue party (i.e. Greens) zone of competence and responsibility (Blühdorn 2009, 42-43). Finally, most Germans have not yet forgotten that the left-wing SPD-Green coalition in the early 2000s adopted an essentially neoliberal Agenda 2010 alongside with Hartz IV legislation, which severely cut welfare benefits (Nachtwey and Spier 2007, 136-142). Furthermore, the overall trend of decreasing electoral salience of the economic dimension on par with other valence issues has pervaded German party politics in the last decade (Franzmann, Giebler, and Poguntke 2020, 4-6). It has attributed greater importance to the socio-cultural dimension of party competition and caused a greater polarization of voters on the respective issue positions (e.g. migration) (ibid).

Consequently, in our analysis, we will not hypothesize the potential effects of economic motivations for Green voting, especially, given the insights from studies that

exhibit weak regionalist differences in patterns of economic voting (see for example Daoust and Dassonneville 2018 on the case of Canada and Quebec). Yet, we will employ several indicators to control for both valence (personal perceptions about the state of national economy) and position economic voting (individual egalitarian welfare orientations) (for more see Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Foucault 2013).

### **New tendencies: the drift of the traditional left parties' voters and a backlash of cosmopolitan citizens**

In the introductory section, several accounts explaining a rocketing growth of the Greens in the 2019 European elections with the accommodation of the demands of the frustrated left voters have been cited. Indeed, the party-voters' alignment in the left segment of the German electoral market has suffered a dramatic erosion. Largely, it has been attributed to the German left-wing party actors, with the SPD experiencing an existential crisis and struggling to come up with a new identity, strategy and policy proposals (Dostal 2017a, 236-239) and The Left being unable to go beyond its niche electorate of the "Old" Left preferences (Patton 2018, 60-63). To elaborate on the issue of the left-wing voters' realignment in favor of the Greens, we have to identify three possible mechanisms of that process.

The first one, logically continuing the beginning of this paragraph, tied with the realignment of the left-leaning citizens, who have been consistent voters of traditional left-wing parties: SPD and The Left. Another mechanism is centered not only on the leftist parties' electorate, but involves voters whose leftist stances are defined in cultural terms as opposed to the classic left economic egalitarianism. In this context, the increasing attractiveness of the Greens for cosmopolitan Germans resonates with a model proposed by Bischof and Wagner (2019), which reflects a backlash of culturally progressive citizens against the emergence of the populist radical right agenda and forces on the political scene. In the described model, the authors focus on and prove the short-term voters' polarization, defined as a situation when "ideological views become more distant from the political center" (ibid, 2), produced by the radical right party entrance in the parliament (ibid, 5-13). This polarization effect has been acknowledged to occur among German citizens following the 2017 populist radical right AfD entrance in the Bundestag (Franzmann, Giebler, Poguntke 2020, 22). Consequently, we conjecture that in the next nationwide election – the 2019 European election – the Green Party had turned into an optimal voting option for cosmopolitan left-leaning Germans, wishing to empower essentially the only force that explicitly opposes the xenophobic stances of the AfD (ibid).

Finally, some speak about a deterioration of the culturally progressive people's trust into the orthodox federal politics in general (Poguntke 2019). It is assumed to be motivated by some citizens' beliefs that in spite of their choice at the polling station, the elected officials from centrist parties will nonetheless sacrifice their promises to reach another encompassing compromise (ibid). That logic, combined with the postulates of second-order elections theory, would explain the increased portions of Greens' votes by the sort of an anti-establishment voting of progressive citizens. However, the latter scenario is rather marginal for our work, thus its effects will not be hypothesized. Instead, we will control for the potential voters' frustration with the ruling coalition that may have fueled the Greens' electoral rise by utilizing measurement of individuals' trust in government.

In turn, the first narrative of the drift of traditional left parties' voters could be evidently gauged empirically by the presence of people with social democratic and The Left party identification among the Greens' voters. Another possible indicator is employment in the service sector (the so-called grey collars) or being a member of the 'precariat' class (e.g. being self-employed), since these social milieus have served the niche electorate of left parties for years (Dostal 2017a, 233-235). Especially, it refers to the social democrats after their U-turn in social policies in the early 2000s, undertaken to cater to the preferences of middle-class voters (Nachtwey and Spier 2007, 136-140). Other core voting clientele of traditional left parties – manual laborers (blue-collars) and the unemployed are not treated as potential voters of the Greens due to the abundantly discussed discrepancy in cultural values between “welfare chauvinist” (Mewes and Mau 2012), “authoritarian working class” (Lipset 1959), and the inclusive libertarian Greens. Yet, it is expedient to use trade union membership as a proxy indicator of the affiliation to the “Old Left” parties voting clientele, since it is strongly correlated with the traditional lower-class membership. With respect to the left-wing voters' backlash mechanism, one possible and widely used metric is the individual self-placement on the left-right ideological scale. Notwithstanding its drawbacks, such as the limited capacity of people to locate their stances on the left-right spectrum correctly, its advantage for our study lies in its ability to grasp the voters' polarization. It is achieved by allowing people to decide for themselves what is politically right or left, irrespective of specific issue-positions, thereby exhibiting their self-perceived distance from ideological center (Bischof and Wagner 2019, 5). Furthermore, the effects of this general indicator will be subsequently related to the values of markers responsible for grasping the *H3.1* and *H3.2* that test the impact of specific progressive and libertarian issue positions of individuals on Green voting.

Accordingly, the last two major hypotheses are of utmost interest in our article and posed with respect to the two aforementioned scenario of German left-wing voters' realignment – the drift of the traditional left wing parties' adherents and the electoral backlash of culturally libertarian leftist citizens:

- H4.1: *If an individual is a traditional supporter of the SPD or The Left, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*
- H4.2: *The more to the left-wing on the political spectrum a person places him or herself, the higher the probability of voting for the Greens.*

## Multivariate regression analysis of the Green voting determinants

### *Data and Method*

Evaluation of the determinants fostering the Green voting in the 2019 European elections requires a comprehensive opinion surveys' data array, dated no earlier than 2018. Our study utilizes an opinion poll data of the 2018 German General Social Survey (ALLBUS)<sup>7</sup> (GESIS 2019). Such a choice is justified with the high degree of sample representativeness; it comprises 3477 observations and diverse topical modules devoted to personal, attitudinal and behavioral information. Questionnaire surveys for the 2018 edition were conducted from April until September with randomly sampled individuals aged 18 and older. The minor drawback of the dataset pertains to the impossibility to measure exhaustively the relevance of some of the hypotheses formulated earlier, above all the economic attitudes and position towards the EU, because it lacks conventional items estimating relation to the level of taxation and the European integration, respectively. Nonetheless, the questionnaire contains other items that serve as appropriate substitutes for the estimation of those attitudes.

The dependent variable of empirical analysis is represented by the respondent's answer to the question asking to estimate his or her probability of voting for the Greens in the national election, measured from 0 ('very unlikely') to 10 ('most likely'). As well, it includes options to indicate non-acquaintance with a party at all (0.6%) and one's uncertainty about the answer (about 2.3%). Such a choice of the dependent variable, rather than a conventional discrete-choice one, is dictated by the possibility of more meaningful statistical analysis of preference for a small party by separating measurement of electoral utility from party choice (Van der Eijk et al. 2006). For example, a recent study of the AfD supporter base also uses this type of DV for almost the same reasons (see Goerres, Spies and Kumlin

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<sup>7</sup> German abbreviation standing for *Die Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften*.

2018). In turn, the operationalization of independent variables is presented in the Appendix 2.

As a basic methodological approach, given the numerical dependent variable and the wide range of predictors, the article employs a regression analysis consisting of OLS regression. After the approbation of the initial hypothesis regarding the presence of a statistically significant East-West difference in the Greens' support, Eastern and Western samples will be extracted from the general population for separate examination. For this step, we need to use standardized regression coefficients to be able to compare the magnitude of estimated effects in both regions. In order to obtain standardized values of both – estimated coefficients and standard errors – we will not simply standardize the resulting beta coefficients, but rescale all variables by subtracting their means and dividing them by standard deviation prior to model fitting. Subsequently, to investigate region-specific effects, we will test the same sets of independent variables on the general population using interaction terms with a specific region.

### ***Results and Interpretation***

Multivariate analysis' results are rendered in a way to present general findings concerning the hypotheses elaborated on the general population and Eastern and Western samples successively. At first, we are to verify the basic hypothesis about the higher probability of citizens' residing in Western Germany for the Green voting.

Table 1 clearly shows that people living in Western German states are by far more prone to vote for the Green party than the easterners are, which is reflected in the values of coefficients of the corresponding variables slightly exceeding one and staying robust when controlling for other socio-demographic features. Hence, the baseline hypothesis of the research about the existence of a significant discrepancy in the Green voting patterns is statistically confirmed (H1). However, the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) value for the first model is negligibly small (slightly exceeding 0.05); therefore, the variable of a geographical residence per se is not sufficient to explain the variance in the propensity of Germans to the Green voting. As a next step, Eastern and Western German samples relative to the residence of interviewees are retrieved, independent variables are grouped in four models (controls, conventional determinants, the inflow of the left-wing voters, aggregate model) and analysis is replicated for each sample respectively.

Table 1. OLS regression output on the dependence between individual's West Germany residence and propensity to vote for the Greens.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Probability of voting for the Greens		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<b>Western Germany residence</b>	<b>1.458***</b> <b>(0.105)</b>	-	<b>1.390***</b> <b>(0.101)</b>
Female	-	0.521*** (0.102)	0.545*** (0.100)
Age: Upper-middle (45-60)	-	0.207* (0.118)	0.167 (0.115)
Age: Young (18-29)	-	0.848*** (0.178)	0.651*** (0.174)
Occupation: Professional	-	0.896*** (0.157)	0.836*** (0.153)
Occupation: White-collar	-	0.997*** (0.191)	0.935*** (0.186)
Occupation: Student	-	1.777*** (0.288)	1.856*** (0.280)
Higher education	-	0.951*** (0.104)	1.003*** (0.101)
Constant	3.843*** (0.087)	3.556*** (0.108)	2.613*** (0.125)
Observations	3,293	3,265	3,265
R <sup>2</sup>	0.055	0.097	0.146
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-	0.094	0.143

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Cells entries are non-standardized regression coefficients and robust standard errors (in parentheses).

Source: Author from ALLBUS 2018 (Baumann, Schulz, and Thiesen 2019).

Table 2 displays a markedly increased share of the explained DV's variance, both for conventional and newly conceived predictors of Green voting and aggregated models, proving a substantial explanatory capacity of the constructed models. However, prior to the interpretation of the inferred results, regional level regression models have to be complemented with the results of analysis conducted on general population that includes regional interaction effects. Because of the bulkiness and a small number of significant interaction terms, regression output is presented in Appendix 4. Thereby, below we provide only the visualization of all statistically significant marginal effects of the East and West German regions on the delineated determinants of Green voting.

Table 2. OLS regression output on respondent's propensity to vote for the Greens.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>							
	Probability of voting for the Greens							
	Eastern Germany				Western Germany			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<b><i>Conventional determinants</i></b>								
Female		0.050 (0.042)		0.027 (0.042)		0.177*** (0.029)		0.113*** (0.029)
Age: NSM gen. (60-74)		-		-		0.015 (0.026)		0.028 (0.026)
Age: Upper-middle (45-60)		-0.0002 (0.037)		-0.003 (0.038)		0.124*** (0.030)		0.089*** (0.029)
Age: Young (18-29)		0.062* (0.034)		0.080** (0.032)		0.050* (0.026)		0.034 (0.026)
Occupation: Professional		0.003 (0.028)		0.037 (0.028)		0.047** (0.021)		0.075*** (0.022)
Occupation: White-collar		-0.006 (0.022)		0.009 (0.022)		0.046*** (0.016)		0.062*** (0.016)
Occupation: Student		0.019 (0.022)		0.018 (0.022)		0.028* (0.015)		0.034** (0.015)
Higher education		0.088** (0.043)		0.058** (0.041)		0.165*** (0.029)		0.124*** (0.028)
Post-material values absorbance		-0.121 (0.075)		-0.106 (0.075)		-0.264*** (0.054)		-0.206*** (0.053)
Euro-optimism		0.728*** (0.121)		0.428*** (0.139)		0.706*** (0.082)		0.442*** (0.096)
Optimism towards immigrants' influx		0.151*** (0.019)		0.118*** (0.02)		0.173*** (0.013)		0.115*** (0.013)
<b><i>Inflow of the left-wing voters</i></b>								
Ideological self-placement (0 - far left, 10 - far right)			-1.389*** (0.155)	-1.138*** (0.166)		-1.876*** (0.097)		-1.330*** (0.102)
Occupation: Grey collar			0.067** (0.031)	0.046 (0.033)		0.109*** (0.022)		0.107*** (0.025)
Occupation: Self-employed			0.044*** (0.013)	0.052*** (0.013)		-0.009 (0.012)		0.006 (0.011)
Party ID: SPD			0.047** (0.024)	0.037* (0.024)		-0.038* (0.022)		-0.030 (0.021)
Party ID: The Left			-0.027 (0.026)	-0.079*** (0.027)		-0.040*** (0.009)		-0.043*** (0.010)
Union membership			-0.018 (0.024)	-0.023 (0.024)		-0.013 (0.017)		-0.012 (0.017)
Trust to federal government			0.948*** (0.123)	0.410*** (0.152)		0.783*** (0.088)		0.328*** (0.103)
<b><i>Controls: economic voting</i></b>								
Evaluation of the current national economic situation	-0.355*** (0.066)	-0.051 (0.072)	-0.135** (0.068)	0.0003 (0.071)	-0.342*** (0.047)	-0.074 (0.047)	-0.171*** (0.045)	-0.062 (0.046)
Social protection - the main goal of government policy	0.273*** (0.071)	0.048 (0.072)	0.185*** (0.069)	0.008 (0.072)	0.284*** (0.057)	0.071 (0.054)	0.306*** (0.054)	0.143*** (0.053)
Constant	4.495*** (0.303)	0.608 (0.468)	4.358*** (0.508)	2.525*** (0.609)	5.911*** (0.224)	1.021*** (0.387)	7.173*** (0.362)	4.051*** (0.456)
Observations	1030	905	992	880	2212	1990	2134	1939
R <sup>2</sup>	0.046	0.220	0.214	0.295	0.038	0.269	0.245	0.341
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.045	0.210	0.207	0.279	0.037	0.265	0.241	0.334

Notes: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Cells entries are standardized regression coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses); for models 2, 3, 4, 7 robust standard errors are used

and put in parentheses. The number of observations varies depending on a model because some respondents did not or could not provide answers to certain questions.

Source: Author from ALLBUS 2018 (Baumann, Schulz, and Thiesen 2019).

Once all necessary statistical operations have been carried out, we may turn to the stepwise interpretation of the results with respect to the posed hypotheses. Combined insights from Table 2 and Figure 1 report a number of discrepancies in relation to the traditional sociodemographic profile of the Greens' supporters described in the literature. It could be inferred that the only sociodemographic hypothesis that finds statistical confirmation for both regional samples is the well-educated people's probability to vote Green (*H2.2*). In turn, hypotheses about a higher propensity of women (*H2.1*) to Green voting turn out to be a significant determinant of Green voting among Western Germans solely. The hypothesis tied with an influence of middle-class members and students' affiliation on the Greens' support (*H2.3*) has been partially proven, i.e. specifically for the white-collar occupational group and only for the Western sample. In the same vein, the age hypothesis (*H2.4*) appears to be partly confirmed, since in the East the youngest enfranchised cohort revealed some positive trends to Green voting that, nevertheless, were not proven after the addition of interaction terms in the model. Meanwhile, in the West the estimated effect of people of the upper-age category (45-60) to vote for the Greens was not only discovered as a reliable predictor but was amplified when combined with the interaction terms of residence in West Germany. In addition, the affiliation with the NSM generation remained an insignificant factor.

Turning to other conventional determinates of the Green voting, the hypothesis about the high level of post-material values' absorption of Green voters (*H3.1*) is confirmed exhaustively for the Western subset. For East German dwellers, the level of an individual's post-materialism has not been found to have an impact on the likelihood of Green voting. Conventional accounts would have justified this phenomenon by the overall lesser level of post-materialist values' acceptance in the East, however, descriptive statistics of the respective variable in the ALLBUS dataset show only a marginal gap between post-material values absorption for both regions.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to this, the left-libertarian attitudes of the Greens' sympathizers explained the strong positive relation with the propensity of Green voting remaining highly significant for both regions (*H3.2*).

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 5.



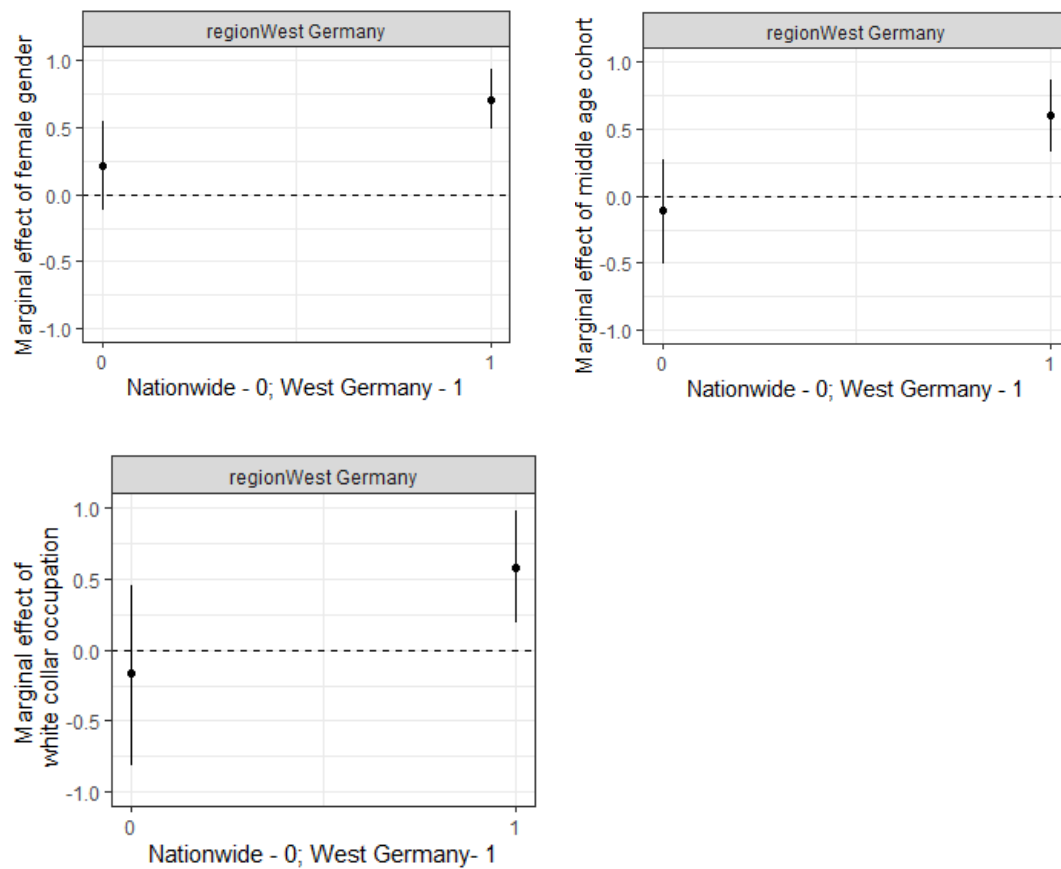
A more regionally distinct picture arises when contemplating covariates that constitute the model designed to grasp the drift of the traditional left voters to the Green party. To mention a few similarities, these are the strong positive correlation of trust to federal government and Green voting, signaling that the Greens' electoral rise was facilitated not by people driven by anti-establishment sentiments but rather by those who prefer conservative solutions within the existing political configuration. In addition, union membership stayed insignificant throughout all models, while 'The Left' party identification was negatively associated with Green voting. This fact points out that the traditional working class, whose members are both more inclined to join unions and vote for a quasi-socialistic 'The Left' (Dalton and Jou 2010, 40-41), were by no means a key social group that contributed to the Greens' vote augmentation in either part of Germany.

However, interaction models revealed that in each part of Germany there has been a unique occupational milieu that is rarely found amid coherent Green followers conventionally but exhibits higher-than-average propensity for Green voting. For Eastern German states, these are self-employed individuals, displaying one of the highest positive coefficients and marginal effects in the East Germany models (see Appendix 4 and Figure 2). What is more, the indicator of the SPD party identification was proved significant specifically for East Germany, even though the size of the estimated marginal effect is relatively moderate, proving the corresponding hypothesis (*H4.1*). As for the Western states, it was detected that grey collars represent an occupational group, members of which are prone to vote Green to an even greater extent than white collars – one of the core professional support groups of the party (Figure 3). Besides, as opposed to the East, in the West there is a significant negative marginal effect of the SPD party identification on the variable of our interest. Finally, Figure 4 reflects one of the most important tendencies discovered, pertaining to the generally more leftist ideological positions of Greens' potential voters in the West (*H4.2*) and more moderate stances of those residing in East Germany.<sup>9</sup> This finding largely frames a discussion of the left-wing voters' realignment in the next paragraph.

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<sup>9</sup> Similar inference could be derived from another visualization of this relationship for both regions, based on the model without interaction effects (available in Appendix 6).

Figure 1. The marginal effect of respondents' female gender, middle age group, white-collar occupational status on the probability of voting for the Greens: West Germany.



Note: Hereinafter black dots indicate values of the unstandardized beta-coefficients, while “whispers” above and below dots indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. The marginal effect of respondents' SPD party identification and self-employed occupational status on the probability of voting for the Greens: East Germany.

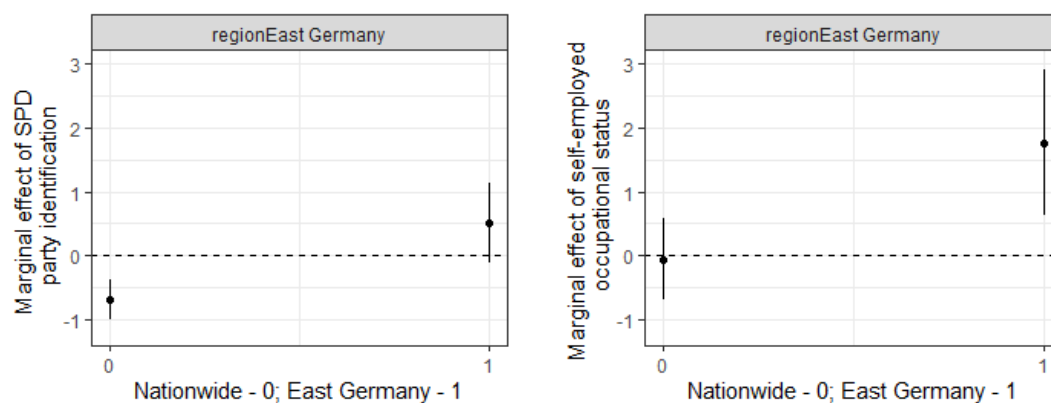


Figure 3. The marginal effect of respondents' SPD party identification and grey collar occupational status on the probability of voting for the Greens: West Germany.

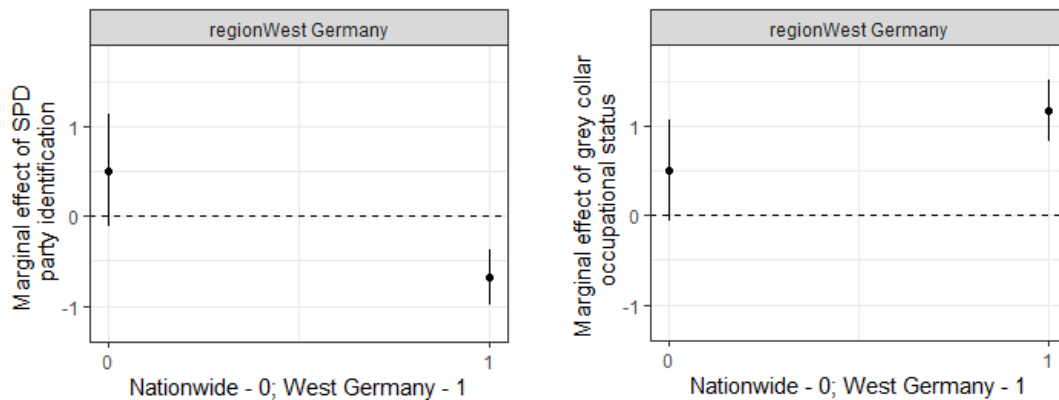
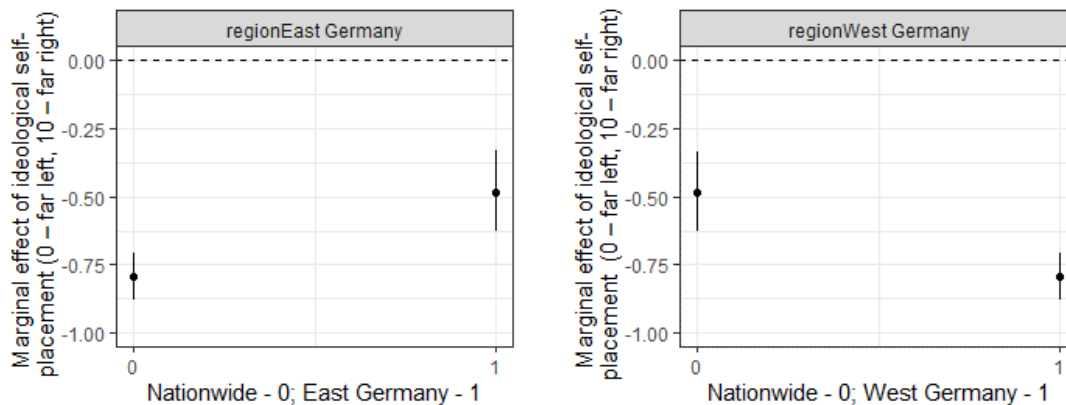


Figure. 4. The marginal effect of respondents' ideological self-placement (0 – far left, 10 – far right) on the probability of voting for the Greens.



Apart from all the above, several notes have to be made concerning the behavior of control of the economic variables. The main effects of the indicator that were supposed to control for economic voting as a valence issue – the evaluation of the national economic situation – appears significant in several models when combined with determinants of the new potential leftist electorate. An identical situation is observed for another indicator, used to account for left-wing welfare preferences – primary value of social protection as a goal of governmental policies. The former always has a negative value, whereas the latter contains positive ones, meaning the correlation of the positive evaluation of a state of national economy and a higher degree of disagreement with the priority of social protection with the Green voting probability. Thus, one may infer that, on the one hand, no clear economic motives for voting of the conventional Greens' electorate are deciphered and, on the other hand, the new left-wing electorate of the party seems to be satisfied with the economic performance and not with the internalization of the traditional leftist economic agenda. Yet,

we hasten to note it is merely a conjecture, arisen as a sub-product of our analysis, and which demands a separate inquiry for a full-fledged empirical verification.

## Discussion

Having summarized the multivariate analyses' outcomes and provided a brief interpretation thereof, it is necessary to take a step back to our theoretical grounds and the broader context of German left-wing voters' realignment. Through the assessment of conventional theoretical accounts of the Greens' electorate, it was disclosed that the conventional profile of the Greens' 'average voter' that could be found in the multiple works is mixed. Taken together with the fact that the Greens' vote share in the May 2019 elections grew considerably, these two observations suggest that the party has attracted a significant portion of the electorate, whose traits and/or attitudes somewhat differ from the ones intrinsic to the niche electorate of the Greens. The most demonstrative indicator of this provision pertains to the occupational background of the Greens' electorate, among which the self-employed (in East Germany) and grey collar (in West Germany) elements emerged.

Overall, it has been brought out that both Eastern and Western augmentation of the Greens' votes were provided at the expense of traditional left voters. Similar to the niche voting clientele of the Greens, represented by the middle-class members, they also predominantly share left-libertarian value orientation. However, interaction models demonstrate that segments of the leftist voters that secured the electoral rise of the Greens in the 2019 EP election differed in the two parts of Germany. In the case of East Germany, the adherents of SPD coupled with the self-employed citizens exposed the highest propensity to support the Greens. Importantly, they generally share more moderate leftist positions than the average Green voters, which, taken together with the insignificance of post-material values absorption as a predictor of Green voting in East Germany, points out the rather materialist considerations-driven character of voting for the Greens.

Amid possible reasons for this one could cite vastly divergent normative value orientations of the two core social milieus of social democrats' electorate – the educated middle-class and manual laborers. The former has been by far more liberal culturally, compared to the rather conservative and authoritarian laborers (Dostal 2017a, 236-238). This first became salient when the migrant crisis broke out and the populist radical right AfD split SPD's vulnerable support coalition around the issue of refugees (Patton 2018, 56-58). Thus, many blue collars, attached to the SPD and The Left switched to voting for AfD in the 2017 federal elections despite the AfD's market economic stances (Adorf 2018). In turn, cosmopolitan middle-class adherents of SPD were dissatisfied with the insufficiency of their

party's actions to safeguard the refugees' asylum rights (Dostal 2017b, 591-95). Subsequently, both groups' dissatisfaction with the social democrats continued to deepen, aggravated by another compromise based grand coalition agreement of the ruling CDU/CSU with the SPD in March 2018. Described patterns were particularly salient in East Germany, which became an electoral stronghold of the AfD due to its massive support among the working class. In turn, the findings of our empirical research illustrate that another part of the social democrats' electorate – the left-leaning precariat – have experienced palpable realignment trends and started to gravitate towards the Green party.

Turning to West Germany, as our findings indicate, there has been not just an absence of the relationship between an individual's party identification with the SPD or The Left, but also a significant negative dependency. Nonetheless, what our analysis reveals is a significantly more leftist ideological self-assessment of an average Green voter in Western states. Coupled with the discovered link between grey collars occupational affiliation, members who constitute a tangible part of the German labor market, and Green voting, it essentially signifies that Greens to a certain extent unintentionally became a catch-all party for the culturally cosmopolitan voters in West Germany. Our empirical analysis provides some conjectures that they were barely driven by economic considerations while presenting strong evidence of their left-libertarian attitudes, which supports the claim that their ideological self-placement refers, above all, to the cultural or so called GAL-TAN dimension (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002).<sup>10</sup> Combined with the positive dependence between the level of one's trust in government and Green voting, we may conclude that our analysis offer reliable evidence for the mechanism of cosmopolitan voters' backlash that boosted Greens' electoral performance.

Notably, no effect of 'The Left voters' leakage to the Greens was disclosed, although the party witnessed electoral losses in the 2019 European elections as well.<sup>11</sup> One explanation of that, extensively discussed in the literature, could be 'The Left core electorate's siphoning-off to the AfD, especially in Eastern Germany. The arguments to support this claim include the presence of a substantial overlap in parties' core voting clientele – the industrial working class and unemployed, pronounced anti-establishment populist elements in their ideology and claims for the reputation of the East German interests' tribune (Olsen 2018; Adorf

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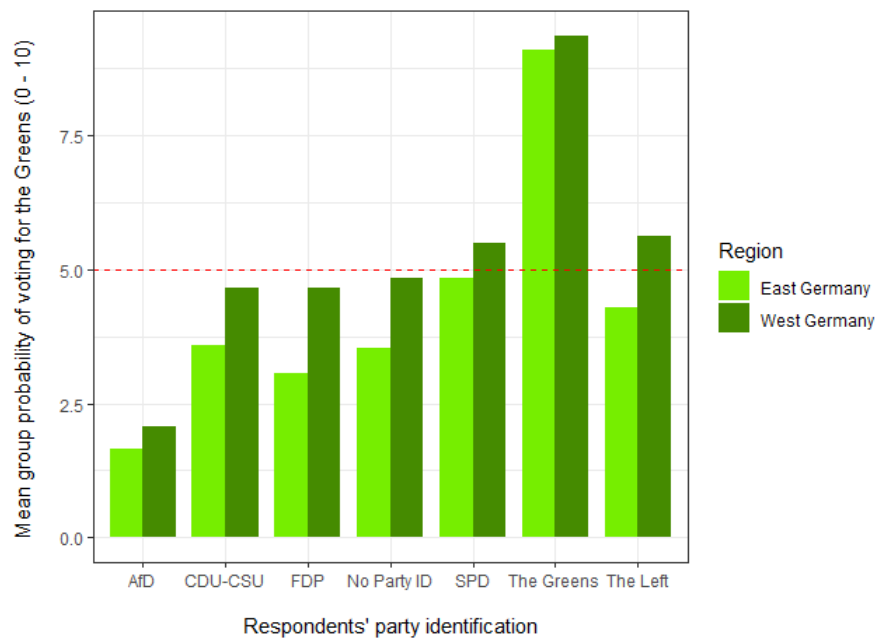
<sup>10</sup> Green/Alternative/Libertarian – Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist: conceptualization of the sociocultural axis of party competition.

<sup>11</sup> Average vote losses of The Left account for 7.16% in the East and 1.15% in the West (Federal Returning Officer's Federal Statistical Office 2019).

2018). Withal, the prevalence of culturally exclusionist sentiments among The Left electorate could have restricted its members to consider the Greens as a promising voting option (ibid).

At last, to put our findings in a broader context, the average acceptance of the Green party among people of different political preferences in both regions of Germany will be demonstrated. For both regional samples we visualize mean values of our main dependent variable – self-estimated probability of respondents' voting for the Greens – among people with certain party identification (narrowed only to the six major parties) as well as those without any party ID.

Figure 5. Visualization of the regional mean group probability of Green voting with respect to the respondents' party ID.



Note: The dashed red line marks the value of Green voting probability equal to five.

Source: Author from ALLBUS 2018 (Baumann, Schulz, and Thiesen 2019).

Figure 5 depicts a graph suggesting that the most likely voters of the Greens are obviously those who identify themselves with this party. The same way one may observe that the next biggest mean group probabilities of Green voting are found among the SPD and The Left adherents. One remarkable feature of the Eastern sample is that mean probabilities for both traditional left-wing parties' devotees fall between the values of "4" and "5" (out of 10), while in the West, they exceed "5", which makes Green voting generally more likely than unlikely. Furthermore, the Western sample is distinguished with the conservative parties' mean probabilities, excluding that of the AfD, which is vastly closer to the threshold value of "5" than the respective values in the Eastern sample.

Hence, the data laid out in the above graphs enable us to speculate about a higher degree of the Green party's acceptance among Westerners, compared to the Eastern states, where Greens have remained to a certain extent a marginal element of local politics. That observation particularly echoes the description of the new left-wing electorate of Greens discovered previously. In the East, it is a rather narrow group of SPD devotees and a self-employed precariat, while in the West these are employees of a core segment of the post-industrial economy – the service sector – with by far more leftist orientations. Coupled with the presence of a more numerous and faithful niche electorate of the Green party in Western states, it completes the picture behind a dramatic difference in the Greens' vote augmentation in the 2019 European election in both regions of Germany.

## Conclusion

This article was set out to investigate reasons behind the spatial difference in the German Green Party upsurge in the 2019 European elections to demonstrate manifestations of the East-West regional cleavage with respect to the modes of party-voters alignment. Preliminarily grounded in scrutinizing the 2019 European elections' outcomes in the given framework, this research proceeded with laying out the theoretical hypotheses, derived from two branches of literature. First, the hypotheses on the geographical disproportionality of the Green Party support, as well as the sociodemographic profile, value orientations and political attitudes of the electorate of the German Green party were drawn from a comparative review of scholarly literature. Another set of hypotheses on the left-wing voters' realignment was retrieved from recent analytic accounts concerned with German electorate behavior in the aftermath of the 2017 Bundestag election and literature on radical right parties' influence on voters' polarization.

Multivariate regression analyses reported that the assumption of a higher likelihood of Green voting in Western Germany was confirmed but could hardly explain a tangible part of its variation. Meanwhile, hypotheses on the bundle of traits of a traditional sociodemographic profile of the Greens' adherents were proven fractionally and only for the Western sample. These results point out that the Greens adherents' profile experienced several alterations. In terms of political and value attitudes, they emerged as generally reliable predictors, with a notable absence of relationship between the level of individual's post-material reflections and Green voting propensity among Easterners. Given that, a supplementary explanation, intertwined with the effects of the left-wing voters' realignment, was proving reliable to account for the electoral rise of Greens.

Essentially, this marks the major finding of this article, explaining that despite the growth of Greens' results in East and West German states, the nature of this support was not identical. Accordingly, two hypotheses were formulated about mechanisms of left-wing voters' realignment – the drift of the traditional left parties' voters and the backlash of left-libertarian citizens embodied in electoral support of the most ardent anti-populist force, i.e. the Greens. Empirically, we brought out that the former mechanism accounts for the Greens' support patterns in the East, where former SPD adherents and occupationally self-employed citizens of moderate left-views have exhibited the highest propensity to support the Greens among the unconventional sectors of the Greens' electorate. As for the Western states, the second mechanism appears to suit realignment trends there, since a higher level of Green voting probability was associated with far more leftist ideological self-placement of citizens, post-material and libertarian values' absorption as well as with strong trust in government. Besides, service sector employees were found extremely likely to vote Green, reflected in the fact that the estimated effects of the white-collars' likelihood to Green voting, who are considered a traditional voting clientele of Greens, were markedly lower than the respective values for grey-collars. The relative weight of that occupational cohort in the contemporary German labor market, and the fact that it has never displayed sympathies towards the Green party earlier reinforce our conclusions about tectonic shifts in German party-voters' alignment. Remarkably, none of the foregoing tendencies affected The Left Party electorate, owing to its voting clientele cultural orientations' incompatibility with the cosmopolitanism shared by the Greens' supporters. By the same token, analyses revealed no relationship between an individual's egalitarian economic stances and proclivity to Greens' support. Finally, we found a generally greater level of acceptance of the Greens among Westerners and its rather marginal role in the Eastern states.

Thus, the research aim of this article has been accomplished, because evidence reflecting different mechanisms of German voters' realignment towards Greens in the East and West were found as well as their dependence of the persisting specifics of German regional politics. Firstly, there is a divergence in the nature of national political parties' ties with the electorate in the Western and Eastern states and a lesser level of party partisanship among Easterners. Also, the prolonged contrast in value orientations between dwellers of the old and new federal states, above all relating to materialism-post-materialism collision, still has implications for electoral patterns.

The article acknowledges its limitations, since the influence of the German regional cleavage on electoral outcomes is investigated solely in the case of one party in a particular



election. Our research does not predict that the peculiar voters' alignment manifested in the 2019 European elections will last onwards. Rather, the discovered patterns may serve as a solid foundation for further investigation in the area of German East-West regional differences effects on the spatial realignment of German voters, by, for example, applying it to the AfD electoral results distribution. Regarding studies of the German Greens, our research concentrates chiefly on the demand side explanation of the Greens electoral performance, only partially accounting for the exogenous factors, hence, applying supply side theories, for instance differences in the agenda promoted by the Greens in East and West Germany, are expected to be seminal for further inquiry.

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Supplementary material is available for this article.